

Leadership is an affair of the heart

Those who explore the topic of leadership will soon find a consistent theme: Leaders must focus on and accept responsibility for results. Yet data is not what drives us as educators to change or improve.

The increasing emphasis on measuring results using state and national tests has led some school leaders to focus on raising test scores. When I have asked teachers and principals, “What is the guiding principle or big idea that drives the work of your school and gives direction and focus to the people who work within it?” the most common response is, “We need to raise test scores.”

State and federal regulations reinforce the focus on results to assess the quality of educational programs in schools and school districts. These regulations require schools to produce measurable results and threaten sanctions if they do not.

While educators can (and often do) challenge the strategies and instruments used to assess student achievement, the idea that education should generate results is unassailable. It is hard to argue against students acquiring certain knowledge and skills in school. It also is hard to argue against schools assessing on an ongoing basis how much students are learning.

Monitoring student achievement on valid tests that assess students’ mastery of essential learning skills can be a powerful tool in school improvement. Carefully analyzing timely assessment data can give individual teachers, teams of teachers, and entire schools greater insights regarding students’ strengths and weaknesses. Such analysis can help teachers identify results-oriented goals that can enhance the school’s effectiveness.

However, appeals to improve test scores are unlikely to generate the enthusiasm and commitment needed to sustain a school improvement effort. Most educators will not be inspired to expend greater effort or explore new strategies in the hope of raising test scores by 5%.

Leaders who are most effective in generating results will appeal not only to the bottom line, but also to the heart. In fact, one of the best strategies for improving

results is connecting with people’s deepest, heartfelt hopes.

What are those hopes? Humans have a fundamental longing to believe we are successful in what we do — our need to achieve. Educators typically are denied this sense of success. Bombarded with too many state, national, and district standards for students to master in the allotted time, teachers often are unclear as to what they are supposed to accomplish. Without a way to determine how well their students are learning compared with similar students, teachers operate in a vacuum that makes it difficult for them to identify their strengths. The media and public figures assail public education in general as a failure.

Another basic need of the human heart is to feel a sense of belonging or connectedness. But most educators work in isolation, facing the myriad challenges of the profession without a support system.

Finally, humans have an innate desire to feel we are making a difference, to feel a sense of significance. In fact, this desire to make a difference is the primary reason most educators enter the profession. But while we may enter with high hopes and noble aspirations, it is easy to be worn down by the demands of the job. When students respond to our best efforts with apathy, when parents approach us as adversaries, and when our districts seem indifferent to us as individuals, it is easy to become cynical and lose sight of the teacher, principal, or person we had hoped to become.

Perhaps more than ever, schools need leaders who purposefully address these matters of the heart. We need leaders who can help create a culture of success by establishing processes to help all teachers clarify a reasonable number of essential learning outcomes and to provide each with timely, relevant information on how their students’ mastery of those outcomes compares with the achievement of similar students. We need leaders who will help schools establish specific, measurable, results-oriented goals and who help each teacher and team understand how they contribute to those goals. We need leaders who plan for (rather than hope for) small wins and who celebrate the successes of individual teachers, teams of teachers, and the entire school in very public ways. We need leaders who tear down the walls of isolation and build a collaborative culture based on teams whose members work together interdependently to achieve common goals.

Above all, we need leaders who remind us of the moral



In each issue of *JSD*, Rick DuFour writes about effective leadership. His columns can be found at www.nsdc.org/library/dufour.html.

RICK DuFOUR is an educational consultant. You can contact him at 465 Island Pointe Lane, Moneta, VA 24121, (540) 721-4662, fax (540) 721-0382, e-mail: rdufour@district125.k12.il.us.

On leadership

"Effective leaders are fanatically driven, infected with the incurable need to produce RESULTS!"

— Jim Collins

"Leadership is not popularity. It is getting results."

— Peter Drucker

"Effective school leaders will manage by results rather than by programs and will inspire others to manage by results as well."

— Phil Schlechty

"Unless you can subject your decision making to a ruthless and continuous judgment by results, all your zigs and zags will only be random lunges in the dark."

— James Champy

"Ultimately, the learning organization must be judged by results."

— Peter Senge

purpose of our profession. The very nature of our profession calls upon us to devote ourselves to making a difference in the lives of others. The success or failure of our efforts will affect the aspirations, opportunities, and quality of life for all our students.

The most effective leaders will ensure that we do not forget that purpose by constantly calling attention to it in meaningful ways. As Michael Fullan wrote (2001): "Leadership, if it is to be effective, has to have an explicit 'making-a-difference' sense of purpose ... and be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it awakens people's intrinsic commitment, which is none other than the mobilizing of everyone's sense of moral purpose."

One of the most effective schools in America makes a conscious effort to appeal to the hearts of staff members. The entire school is organized into collaborative teams that are given time each week to work together in the pursuit of common goals. A portion of every staff meeting is set aside to celebrate the efforts and achievements of individuals and teams and to review indicators of the progress the school is making in achieving its goals. Each year, every high school senior is required to write persuasive essays on the teachers who have had the greatest positive impact upon that student's life. Excerpts from these essays are distributed to the entire staff every six weeks as a powerful reminder, in students' own words, that teachers are shaping their future. Every graduate is surveyed to identify

the teachers who were instrumental in their success, and every teacher who is named on that list gets a congratulatory letter from the principal. One faculty meeting each year is devoted to staff members presenting public testimonials about colleagues who have had a profound impact on their own professional learning. The school has created a culture of success, collaboration, and moral purpose — and every staff member believes his or her efforts can be noted, appreciated, and celebrated by the school community.

Leaders who reject the idea of appeals to the heart as too "soft" for the data-driven, results-oriented schools they hope to create need to re-think their assumptions. In their landmark study of leadership, James Kouzes and Barry Posner (1991) found that one distinguishing characteristic of leaders who were most effective in producing desirable results was their attention to "encouraging the heart." These leaders realized that the best way to get results is to engage in an ongoing process of reminding people that their work is important, they are being successful, and their continued success will depend in large part on their willingness to work together to share their knowledge, skills, and insights. Data can inform, but unless data are translated into powerful stories that speak to the emotions, facts are unlikely to inspire. Leaders make a mistake when they appeal only to the head. The best leaders realize that ultimately, they must appeal to the heart.

REFERENCES

- Champy, J. (1995).** *Reengineering management: The mandate for new leadership*. New York: Diane Publishing.
- Collins, J. (2001).** *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap ... and others don't*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Drucker, P. (1996).** Not enough generals were killed. In F. Hesselbein, M. Goldsmith, & M. Beckhard (Eds.), *The leader of the future*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2001).** *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kouzes, J. & Posner, B. (1991).** *The leadership challenge: How to keep getting extraordinary things done in organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Slechty, P. (1997).** *Inventing better schools: An action plan for educational reform*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R.B., & Smith, B.J. (1994).** *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization*. New York: Doubleday. ■